

## 2.0 FORT WAINWRIGHT

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### ***Introduction***

A variety of smaller-sized construction projects in the Yukon Training Area (YTA) and on the main post were the focus of the archaeological work at Fort Wainwright in 2005. Work at Fort Wainwright's Donnelly Training Area (DTA) will be discussed in a separate annual report.

### ***Setting***

Fort Wainwright is located in central Alaska, north of the Alaska Range in the Tanana River valley. The Post lies 120 miles south of the Arctic Circle near the cities of Fairbanks and North Pole in the Fairbanks North Star Borough. The installation consists of the Main Post, Tanana Flats Training Area (TFTA), YTA, Dyke Range and DTA (the latter of which lies near Delta Junction, within the boundaries of the former Fort Greely).

Fort Wainwright has the northern continental climate of the Alaskan Interior, characterized by short, moderate summers, long, cold winters, and little precipitation or humidity. Average monthly temperatures in Fairbanks range from -11.5°F in January to 61.5°F in July, with an average annual temperature of 26.3°F. The record low temperature is -66°F and the record high is 98°F. Average annual precipitation is 10.4 inches, most of which falls as rain during summer and early fall. Average annual snowfall is 67 inches, with a record high of 168 inches during the winter of 1970-71 (CEMML 2002).

Fort Wainwright's training lands fall within an area occupied at the time of Euro-American contact by Lower-Middle Tanana Athabascans, including 'bands' described generally as the Salcha, Big Delta-Goodpaster, Wood River and Chena bands (McKenna 1981; Andrews 1975; Mischler 1986). Traditional settlement patterns were focused on a widely mobile season round, with the fall caribou hunt playing a pivotal role in subsistence preparations for the winter, while summer activities were focused at fish camps, and on berry and root collecting and sheep hunting (McKenna 1981). These activities were frequently communal in focus, with several local 'bands' connected by common interest, geography and intermarriage. Despite anthropological attempts to define 'boundaries' for the peoples living in the lower Tanana River valley, natural terrain served as the only definable 'boundary' to settlement patterns (McKenna 1981).

As Euro-American traders, miners, missionaries and explorers moved into the Tanana River valley, the traditional lifeways of local Athabaskan groups were disrupted. Access to trade goods and the development of the fur trade not only affected traditional material culture, but also began to dramatically affect subsistence activities and settlement patterns. Similarly, the arrival of missionaries in the Alaskan interior profoundly affected traditional social organization. The introduction of mission schools for Native children and the doctrine of new religious beliefs contributed to an erosion of traditional settlement patterns and practices (McKenna 1981).

As Fairbanks grew in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, several agricultural homesteads were developed on lands now encompassed by sections of the Fort Wainwright cantonment. These homesteads provided Fairbanks with a variety of agricultural products and wood for fuel, but were subsumed when lands were withdrawn for the creation of Ladd Field, which later became Fort Wainwright (Price 2002).

Development in the Alaskan Interior increased dramatically with the advent of World War II and subsequent military build-up in Alaska. Of particular significance was the development of airfields near Delta Junction (Fort Greely), Fairbanks (Ladd Field, later Fort Wainwright), and 26 miles southeast of Fairbanks (Eielson Air Force Base). These locations began as lend-lease bases and cold weather testing centers, but soon expanded with the increased need for military support during World War II and later the Cold War (Price 2004).

Archaeological research on Fort Wainwright's training areas has resulted in numerous technical reports (Bacon 1978; Bacon and Holmes 1979; Dixon et al. 1980; Frizzera 1973; Higgs et al. 1999; Holmes 1979; Potter et al. 2000; Rabich and Reger 1978; Reynolds 1983, 1984, 1985; Robertson et al. 2004; Staley 1993; Steele 1982, 1983; Yarborough 1975), scientific papers (Holmes and Anderson 1986; West 1967, 1975), and the identification of over 250 archaeological sites. Work on Fort Wainwright has been largely stratified sampling in nature, resulting at times in as little as 1 percent of the survey universe being inventoried. This work has largely focused on known sites and areas thought to be of the very highest potential for containing archaeological sites. Areas of less than ideal site potential have often been neglected and sites and districts that may be eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places have been incompletely documented or left un-evaluated. Thus, while a large number of important sites have been identified on Fort Wainwright, a number of important gaps exist in the cultural resource inventory.

Despite its incomplete nature, this rich archaeological record represents all of the accepted prehistoric cultures of the Alaskan Interior. Of importance is the role played by archaeological resources located on Army lands in the definition of the Denali Complex of the American Paleoarctic Tradition (Anderson 1970; West 1967, 1981). Though not located on Army lands, two of the oldest well-dated sites in North America, Swan Point and Broken Mammoth, dated to between 11,500 and 12,000 before present (BP), are located just to the north of DTA East in the vicinity of Shaw Creek (Holmes 1996, 1998; Holmes et al. 1996; Yesner et al. 1999). Sites reflecting the influence of what has been termed the Northern Archaic Tradition (e.g. Anderson 1968; Workman 1978), dating to perhaps 6,000 to 2,000 BP, are also present on Fort Wainwright training lands, as are late prehistoric Athabaskan (e.g. Andrews 1975, 1987; Cook 1989; Mishler 1986; Sheppard et al. 1991; Shinkwin 1979; Yarborough 1978) and Euro-American archaeological sites (Gamza 1995; Phillips 1984). The significance of these known sites on Army Withdrawal Lands is attested by the fact that despite that nearly 100 of these sites remain to be evaluated, at least 75 individual sites and 3 archaeological districts have been deemed eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places, and a fourth archaeological district remains to be evaluated.

Historic research dealing with Fort Wainwright includes recent historic context studies that deal with homesteading (Price 2002), early mining (Neely 2001), and early transportation on Fort Wainwright (Neely 2003). Although mining was perhaps the most important economic endeavor of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Fort Wainwright area, only three archaeological sites associated with mining have been recorded on Army managed lands in Alaska (Neely 2001). Several early transportation routes, roadhouses, and other structures associated with travel are known to exist in the vicinity of Fort Wainwright and the DTA, including the Donnelly-Washburn and Bonnifield trails, for example (Neely 2003). Military training and construction activities have also resulted in several potential site types, including downed aircraft, defensive fighting

positions, and training and target debris. The majority of these 'Base Ground Defense Sites' are difficult to assign to a specific context, and have often been consistently used for military training exercises; such sites have thus been determined ineligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (see Shaw 2000).